Understanding School Bullying

Article Critique

Lesley Taylor Swartz

Liberty University

Understanding School Bullying

**Annotated Bibliography/Summary**

Despite tireless efforts of interventions and school programs, bullying remains to be stronger than ever. The message of this article is that the phenomenon of bullying needs to be researched and evaluated more broadly. In this instance, they are researching from a social and cultural perspective. According to the authors, students develop and establish norms within their own community and culture, and it is all about similarity. When a student deviates from the established norm, or in other words, appears different, they become a target to various methods of bullying, such as teasing, amusement, silencing, rituals, misrepresentation, and isolation.

The suggestions stemming from the research is for educators to become more aware of the cultural and social values and norms within the student community. By understanding the driving factors of this phenomenon, educators can be better equipped to intervene.

**Critique**

The authors Hamarus and Kaikkonen (2008) conducted a study among students between the ages of 13 and 15 in various schools located within central Finland. Much research on this topic has indicated that the problem often begins with seeking power or popularity by the bully. The findings reveal that bullies obtain this power and popularity by pointing out differences in an individual. This phenomenon is generated and fueled by creating unity of similarity based on the established norm. Anyone who is different is an outsider and becomes a target.

The contention of the authors is that the core of bullying is the perception of difference. According to the authors, in order to intervene and design programs to combat this bullying phenomenon, we must understand bullying behavior from a cultural and social perspective and recognize that diversity in the classroom is increasing by leaps and bounds.

Hamarus and Kaikkonen also discuss how bullies are using more covert forms in which to bully. They refer to today’s bullying as a hidden language, understood by students only and not easily detected by teachers. In an effort to combat these covert forms of bullying, one of the most impressive recommendations of the article is for teachers to get to know their students well in addition to familiarizing themselves with the school community norms. By becoming familiar with the students, their personalities, and their unspoken language, it will be easier to understand and recognize this hidden message among bullies and the bullied.

Another valuable suggestion from the authors in this article is to call for a shared understanding and interpretation of the bullying phenomenon among teachers, students, parents, and administrators. As stated in the article, “Evidence of differences between teachers’, parents’ and pupils’ understandings of bullying may have serious consequences for how the schools successfully deal with the problem” (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008, as cited in Naylor et al. 2006, p.335). The authors go on to state that communication between the students, parents, and teachers regarding the interpretation of bullying, the school community norms, and various forms of bullying, is essential in undermining the power of a bully.

**Reference:**

Hamarus, P. & Kaikkonen, P. (2008, December). School bullying as a creator of pupil peer pressure. *Educational Research*, 50(4), p.333-345.